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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0986
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1689
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 0666
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFAAA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNCS/NSC WASHDC 1171
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC 1087
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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: MAZHILIS HOSTS "PATH TO EUROPE" CONFERENCE

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¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: On May 21, the Mazhilis (the lower house of parliament) hosted a conference entitled, "Modern Kazakhstan and the Path to Europe." The high-profile event, attended by high-ranking government officials and foreign parliamentary delegations, centered on Kazakhstan's strategy for strengthening ties with European countries. Most of the speeches brought no surprises, although there were a few comments worthy of note. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (SBU) On May 21, the Mazhilis hosted a conference entitled, "Modern Kazakhstan and the Path to Europe." The Path to Europe is the government's strategy for moving the country toward European standards and establishing closer economic ties with Europe. It was initiated by President Nazarbayev and adopted last year. The conference was carried out with much pomp and circumstance in the main chamber of the Mazhilis and was attended by many high-ranking government officials and representatives of the Astana diplomatic corps. There were also several parliamentary delegations from other countries, including Austria, Greece, Turkey, and Russia. Most speeches covered familiar ground -- Kazakhstan's political and economic achievements since independence and its priorities for the upcoming chairmanship of the OSCE -- although there were several comments of interest.

MAZHILIS SPEAKER ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

¶4. (SBU) Mazhilis Speaker Ural Mukhamedzhanov praised the positive role that open access to information can play in economic development, especially with the help of the Internet, but he warned that "such access cannot be limitless. Words lead to action," he maintained, "and there have been instances where merely exercising the freedom of speech has had severe political and social consequences." He congratulated Kazakhstani journalists for "achieving certain standards" and moving away from "simple libel" towards "constructive criticism." (NOTE: The Mazhilis recently approved amendments to Kazakhstan's Internet legislation which would, if adopted by the Senate in their current form, make all information-related websites subject to Kazakhstan's media legislation, including its libel laws. END NOTE.)

"THE FREEWAY TO EUROPE"

15. (SBU) Senate Chairman Kosym-Zhomart Tokayev told the audience that Kazakhstan's upcoming 2010 OSCE chairmanship is "expanding the definition of Europe." Through its Path to Europe program, he said, Kazakhstan is laying "the freeway from Asia to Europe." European values like the rule of law and respect for human rights are "global values," asserted Tokayev, and Kazakhstan is striving to meet them, albeit "in the context of Kazakhstan's political specifics." He noted Norway's special status with the European Union and said that this could be a possible model for Kazakhstan.

CIS PARLIAMENTARY REP RAILS AGAINST ODIHR

16. (SBU) One of several foreign guests who spoke at the conference was Mikhail Krotov, the Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the CIS Council. Krotov used the opportunity to rail against what he said were OSCE's "murky rules" on election observation, which, in his view, lead to the OSCE's "double standards" in election monitoring. He asserted that the CIS Council has developed a "clear and transparent" convention on election monitoring, one that was "successfully used during Russia's recent Presidential elections." This convention has received the support of the European Parliamentary Assembly but was not adopted by the European Council, which, Krotov maintained, was yet another confirmation of Europe's "double standard." In his view, Kazakhstan should use its OSCE chairmanship "to bring the OSCE closer to the CIS" and push for a reconsideration of OSCE's election monitoring mechanisms.

RUSSIANS NOT AWARE OF CONFERENCE?

17. (SBU) Following the conference, the Dutch and OSCE Ambassadors stated that they appreciated the CIS parliamentary representative's "clarity on his position." The Dutch Ambassador added that this was the first opportunity for the Russian government to publicly state

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its view and that it was likely that "his boss" would try to press Kazakhstan further on ODHIR's role. (NOTE: Putin visited Astana the day after the conference ended. END NOTE). Later, the Charge ran into Russian Ambassador Boncharkov at Astana Airport and commented on his absence. Boncharkov seemed genuinely unaware of the conference, but did not appear perturbed by that fact. Commenting on the Path to Europe program, he said with a light tone, "Ah, but that is not our path."

MILAS